

# NEWS ANALYSIS

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## Romania: mixed messages

There is mounting concern among health advocates around the world about the tobacco industry's latest public relations strategy: pretending that it has changed, and asking for a dialogue with government and health authorities in place of previous confrontation. It is as if a person repeatedly convicted of theft decides, perhaps on the advice of his lawyers, to announce a change of character, and engage the police force in pleasant conversation, helped along by a generous contribution to funds, and sponsorship of a programme purporting to reduce crime. The paedophilia analogy in the editorial of this issue is equally valid (p 261). To demand instant acceptance of a change is not only inappropriate, but presumes that the industry has

changed its entire character. In reality, there is no sign whatever of any change in areas where it really matters, such as the promotion of tobacco in developing countries, or the slick manipulation of media messages in its ongoing attempt to downplay the risks of its lethal products. Furthermore, there is the potential of great damage to the goals of health agencies who are taken in by the industry's new strategy, for such is all it amounts to.

That this disturbing strategy is inappropriate and can lead to embarrassment and ineffectiveness can be seen in Romania, where no one could fault the health minister in his speech at the academy of economic studies in the capital on 30 May, in a meeting to mark World No Tobacco Day. He did not mince words about the industry. One of the major principles of the tobacco industry is to highlight the notion that a "decision" to smoke is an act of liberty, he told his audience in a country where liberty is a particularly important concept, and one which, for most citizens, was only regained comparatively recently. He went on to explain the irrelevance of the concept when it comes to smoking, especially in view of tobacco companies' promotional activities,

associating images of handsome young men and women exuding high spirits and good health with tobacco consumption. This is cheating the public, he said, citing studies that have shown how smoking uptake is influenced by the promotional activities of the tobacco industry. And for good measure he ended his speech by repeating the message of the director general of the World Health Organization: "Don't be duped—tobacco kills!"

Unfortunately, on the very same day, the *Adevarul* newspaper ran an advertisement from British American Tobacco (BAT) and Philip Morris about their joint educational programme. Headed "Education programme", presumably to explain to those who thought it was just another cigarette promotion, the advertisement showed a suitably healthy and obedient looking child saying: "The decision is mine. I don't smoke! Our creed is that minors don't have to smoke!" Under the companies' names, a caption explained how this was the pilot of an educational programme carried out by the ministry of education with the support of the ministry of youth and sport—and the ministry of health.



Advertisement placed by BAT and Philip Morris in the Romanian newspaper *Adevarul*, about the companies' joint educational programme, claiming support by the country's ministry of health.

## Turkey: F1 overtaken by health team

More good news of coalitions at work, this time in Turkey. As reported previously, for a country with no interest in motor sport (or much sport other than soccer), a curiously persistent campaign has been waged recently, apparently trying to make people think that Formula 1 motor racing would be a desirable, even essential addition to their lives (see *Tobacco Control* 1999;8:243). The sudden appearance of F1 references in advertisements for other goods, the run of unprompted, favourable comment in the press, and the emergence of pro-F1 supporters saying how wonderful it would be for Turkey to host F1 races, all reeks of the tobacco



In Kazakhstan, as in Romania (see previous page), Philip Morris has been sponsoring youth education campaigns. The slogans on this page of a PM calendar say, in Kazak and Russian, "Smoking? Nowadays No!" Health advocates are concerned that such industry programmes may delay effective tobacco control measures.

industry. But then the minister for tourism began a much more open campaign. Turkey's tourist industry is securely based on a long coastline of gorgeous beaches, a vast wealth of fascinating historical sights, and modern facilities coupled with courteous people with a still tangible colourful, traditional lifestyle. Notwithstanding this, the minister implied that F1 presented Turkey with the most extraordinary opportunity for development it would ever be lucky enough to embrace. It was when Mr Arkaçali, the former health minister who was the original sponsor of the tobacco control bill which ultimately became law, banning all forms of tobacco promotion, appeared in the media to back

the proposal that health advocates realised the situation had become dangerous.

The threat to the law was so serious that health advocates approached groups working in other fields, as well as calling on the international colleagues to take action. A coalition started to form, soon reaching 35 organisations, and the minister of tourism and Mr Akarçali began to receive letters and faxes from around the world. These explained how F1 was dominated by the tobacco industry, which had clearly identified the sport as the best way to go on promoting tobacco in the region after the European ad ban had come into effect, and how this would blow apart Turkey's hard won tobacco control law. The coalition adopted the slogan "I am not going to give away my law", holding demonstrations and organising press coverage around the country. Adapting a World No Tobacco Day slogan "Don't be duped, smoking kills!", the coalition's message was "Don't be duped: F1 is advertising—and smoking still kills!". The outreach potential of some coalition members made them hard to ignore: the consumers rights association, for example, has over 10 000 members, and is adept at lobbying opinion leaders; in short, they can command the attention of politicians keen to hold on to their jobs.

The coalition's work was made much easier by access to previously secret internal industry documents. One, a major survey by Philip Morris of advertising opportunities, concluded that F1 was the only remaining

communications medium in some restricted markets. Others showed how the industry had manipulated the Turkish media, much of which is linked to the local tobacco industry through family ties, during the passage of the tobacco control law. Through such documents being aired through the coalition's work with the media, it became obvious to the Turkish public that dirty work was afoot, and sensing this crucial enlightenment, the previous F1 enthusiasts changed their tune. The tourism minister guaranteed to defend the law, and Mr Arkaçali thanked those who had written to him for their prompt action in support of the measures that began life through his efforts. He assured them that no-one could modify it, while mentioning that he would have no objection to any motor race without any tobacco advertising.

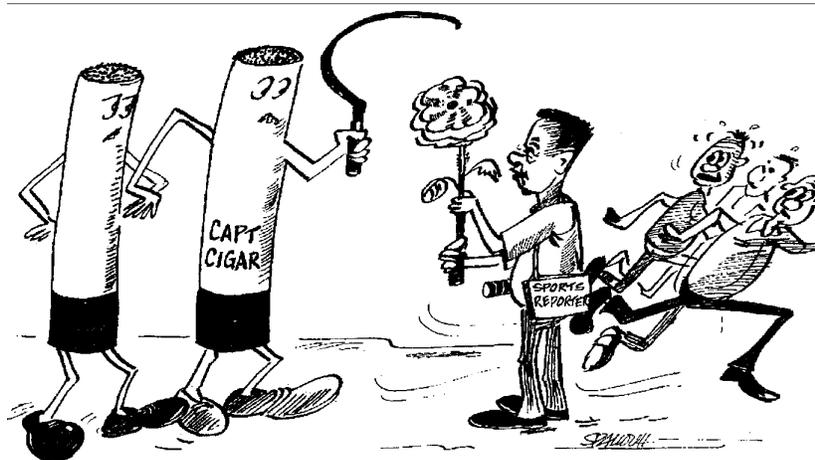
Health advocates know better than to think they have a lasting victory, and suspect that after a summer truce, big tobacco will try again. But the coalition now has a say in the agenda, and if circumventing the intentions of health policy were comparatively easy for the tobacco industry in the past, neither it nor the politicians can expect to get away with doing tobacco's dirty work unobserved in the future.

## Uganda: sportsman sent off

Good news from Uganda! As reported in our last issue, for the past 10 years BAT has ensured minimum criticism of the outrageously inappropriate advertising for its Sportsman cigarette brand by sponsoring the annual Sportsman Gala awards ceremony of the Ugandan Sports Press Association (USPA) (Uganda: athletes fight BAT's abuse of sports. *Tobacco Control* 2000;9:129–30). The sponsorship began to bring hostile comments, intensifying after it was highlighted last year in a newspaper article by dissenting sports journalist and athletics coach Kevin O'Connor. Out of this episode came increasing cooperation by like-minded health and medical organisations, a lawyers' group, and individuals such as Mr O'Connor. Meeting under the auspices of the ministry of health's Tobacco or Health Forum, they augmented and multiplied the ministry's work on tobacco control. They helped articulate a public rejection of tobacco promotion, while the ministry's stand appeared to gain in volume and confidence as previously indifferent media



Turkish poster stating "Don't be duped—smoking kills" and urging that the 1996 law banning tobacco advertising must not be changed.



Newspaper cartoon depicting sports journalist and athletics coach Kevin O'Connor, after his attack in a Ugandan newspaper on tobacco sponsorship of sport.

began to take up the issue. Eventually, on the day at the USPA gala on 28 May, it was announced that Sportsman's sponsorship of the event was finishing, to be replaced by Nile Breweries. Another article by Kevin O'Connor, breaking the news of the change in sponsors, was prominently displayed in *The East African*, an influential newspaper read in several countries in the region. And befitting a member of the health coalition, O'Connor elegantly clarified health differences between the products of the old sponsor and the new.

The sustained campaign by the ministry and its supporting coalition against the unethical association of unhealthy smoking and healthy sport had got top newspaper journalists speaking out against the tobacco funded gala, later echoed by leading sports administrators. One lone newspaper crudely stuck to the BAT line to the bitter end, even claiming, between free coverage of one of BAT's most cynical promotions (see "Think and Win" story below), that the Sportsman gala "attracted all the country's leading sports personalities". In reality, out of the 16 national sports associations, only one sent its president or chairman to the event. In a pleasing piece of inter-ministerial solidarity, even the minister of sports skipped the event after consultations with the director general of medical services. And perhaps most telling of all, the two runners up for the annual Sportsman of the year award were also absent.

The Sportsman saga has important lessons for tobacco control advocates in developing countries, especially the role of the Tobacco or Health Forum. The members worked together to build up public opinion against the exploitation of sport by BAT, adding the skills and imprimaturs of other people and

organisations to the government's resources in a classic example of the sort of coalition that is so essential for standing up to the tobacco industry. As in other cases featured in recent editions of *Tobacco Control*, it shows that even in countries whose economic resources are less than the turnover of one of the transnational tobacco companies, where the companies used to do much as they pleased, people working together for health can win major battles.

## Kenya: BAT at it again—but it's changed

We have reported extensively in past issues on the disgraceful seminars held by BAT for journalists from developing countries, to "put the other side", give a "more balanced view", and generally assist them, industry style, with their journalistic work on the smoking "debate" or "controversy". Now it has done it again, despite protestations issued in countries where incriminating internal documents have been widely exposed, that it has changed its ways. Sure, BAT, like rival Philip Morris, has put together a website that appears to acknowledge the scientific evidence against active (though expressly not passive) smoking. However, a cursory glance by anyone with more than a passing interest will see what an incomplete, unsatisfactory collection of weasel words and agenda changing much of it is. However, as is evident from so many of the items in this journal, what seems to have changed is the strategy rather than overall behaviour.

So it was that in May, a group of east African journalists were flown to what a lucky recipient of BAT's largesse described as one of Kenya's most prestigious hotels, the luxurious Windsor Golf and Country Club. This time the seminar's faculty appears to have lacked the outside "experts" of the past, perhaps because some of the minor academic establishments or private foundations they tended to represent objected to the intellectual prostitution with which they were inevitably linked by greedy employees. So it was left to BAT staff to try to demonstrate first, that the company had changed, and second, that they were no longer accountable for past practices, even though present practices in marketing and public relations seem little or no different.

Certainly the approach is more subtle—out with obvious denials of the evidence on disease and addiction, in with a new array of weasel words and better techniques for clouding the issues. After a passing reference to established risk, BAT's Mr Keith Gratton put up a thick smokescreen of allegedly unresolved questions. For example, he exploited an old favourite, the fact that science still has to determine why the majority of smokers do not contract lung cancer. He then charged poor, abused science with having to divide the blame between smoking and the role played by factors such as family history, diet, and the environment. Even his acceptance of the risks of tobacco was densely hedged by unspecific reservations, and he could not resist leading on to another industry regular, the myth of free choice in starting to smoke. "We accept that in the most simple sense, smoking is a cause of certain serious diseases," he was reported to have told the journalists, but the risks were well known and "people still decide to smoke". So that's all right then.

Students of communications could write a doctorate on the role of this sort of language in pretending to address the fact that cigarettes are addictive and kill about half their users. But who needs such finesse when the effect of the seminar on a senior journalist can be so decisively pro-tobacco? Mr Kyazze Simwogerere, editor of Uganda's *Sunday Monitor*, was reported by another Ugandan newspaper as saying that, compared to AIDS, fast cars or cholesterol, "tobacco is just a soft option. It's hard to stand these moralistic, puritanical guys who are just gripping onto a cause for the sake of pushing a cause." BAT may have changed the detail, but in this dark

purpose, as with its promotional activities in east Africa, it hasn't changed a bit.

## Uganda: “Think and Win”—BAT hasn't changed

BAT has changed, its public relations people are strenuously trying to assure the world. But there is no discernible change in its marketing practices, as a crude promotion to hundreds of children during the Showtime Football event in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, amply demonstrated last April. Even ignoring the fact that sales of individual sticks is the sort of practice BAT can no longer get away with in the west—we can hear them protest that local customs are different around the world—the name itself is clearly a cynical parody of the International Quit and Win smoking cessation competition. In the absurdly inappropriately named “Think and Win” competition, anyone purchasing a mere five of BAT's Embassy cigarettes was given an entry form for a competition. The forms went into a prize draw lottery for a cornucopia of desirable prizes, including a luxury holiday for two to South Africa. By little coincidence, it seems, the draw took place at the end of May, just about the time of the Quit and Win draw and the World Health Organization's World No Tobacco Day.

Tackled later about the Think and Win Embassy promotion at the Showtime Football event, BAT's local head of corporate and regulatory affairs claimed that his team had operated just for a short time during the half



Scenes from the Embassy “Think and Win” promotion held during the Showtime Football event in the Ugandan capital, Kampala.

time break at the soccer match. It seemed to be a case of just allowing enough time for people to buy their five cigarettes and grab an entry form. Unfortunately for BAT, a member of the ministry of health's Tobacco or Health group happened to be present all afternoon and well into the evening, and pictures of hundreds of children enjoying disco dancing shows on a stage throughout the period were published later in a local newspaper. By the time some of these were shot, it was clearly dark, and as the ground did not have floodlights, the match must have long since finished.

The Showtime Football promotion was only one among many. There were travelling promotions in expensive four wheel drive vehicles, and three regional draws, each the occasion of much publicity, with people lining up to sample a free Embassy cigarette or buy their qualifying five cigarettes to enter the competition. As obsequiously reported by the newspaper *New Vision*, which does a passable imitation of a BAT house journal, “Wherever Embassy went all over the country, there was no stopping the people who kept flowing in.” The actual promotions and the explanations that follow them may change, but clearly BAT has not.

## Papua New Guinea: black mark for Red Cross

Bad news from Papua New Guinea (PNG), where BAT has once again

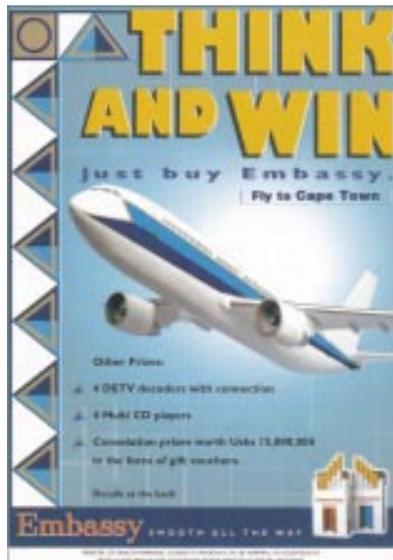
sponsored the Red Cross Miss PNG Quest, as ironically (or cynically) reported on 31 May, World No Tobacco Day. The Quest was somewhat defensively described by its chairperson, Ms Sue Darby, as a fund raising effort to benefit the charity work of the Red Cross, in which she said judgement was based on the intelligence, talents, and efforts of the entrants, and “not a beauty contest, as some think”. More to the point, BAT's PNG corporate affairs manager Mr Vai Reva said of the 7500 Kina (approximately US\$3000) sponsorship, its sixth annual donation: “We see that the Red Cross plays a very, very big role in the society, and we'd like to associate ourselves with the good work that the Red Cross is doing in the country.” Quite so.

The inevitable quote from Ms Darby on behalf of the Red Cross expressing grateful appreciation included the mystifying statement that the sponsorship was “a positive gesture of support from the public”. Perhaps BAT is so much in charge of things in PNG that Ms Darby's confusion of it with the public is understandable; or maybe the smell of the money distorted her reasoning abilities. Then again, she may simply lack some of those vital qualities required of entrants to the Miss PNG Quest. Whichever is the case, young women in PNG may in future be just that little bit less likely to appreciate the scale of the risk they run of contracting a serious disease if they become addicted to the sponsor's products.

## World: a tale of two centuries

Estimates of mortality from tobacco are mind boggling even at the local level—telling a politician that a hundred of his or her potential voters will go to an early grave this year just because they smoked can be a very effective way of making them take the issue seriously. But at national level, even modest estimates are so large it is not surprising that politicians and the public find it difficult to comprehend the true scale of avoidable disease and early deaths caused by tobacco use. Move on to the global scale and the World Health Organization estimates by Peto and Lopez (two to three million per annum now, reaching 10 million sometime in the 2020s) are so vast as to be like the cause—breathtaking.

Now Professor Sir Richard Peto of Oxford University, UK, has gone still higher. Reviewing global mortality in



Embassy “Think and Win” competition entry form.

the past century, which saw the establishment and rapid spread of cigarette smoking and the massive burden of disease that follows it, and looking forward over the next century on the assumption that current trends in consumption are maintained, his calculations have reached a near unthinkable level. For the two centuries combined, the addictive, lethal products of an industry that lied and cheated to avoid regulation, which now exposed, assures us it has changed while continuing to push them ever more outrageously, and to obfuscate about disease, will kill in total one billion human beings. As Peto modestly points out, when you have one billion deaths to deal with, you can do quite a lot by even moderate changes.

## Canada: industry excuses over health warnings

We have all heard some good stories from the tobacco industry about how tobacco control legislation will wreck a country's thriving economy overnight, throw millions of people out of work, and usher in a long, dark era of totalitarianism. We have been warned about the imminent collapse of the health services, not from the burden of disease caused by tobacco, but from the loss of smokers paying all that tax, then selflessly laying down their lives for their country before they needed to draw their pensions. Mass arrests and torture are evidently just round the corner for those hapless citizens who choose to practise any innocent and pleasurable pastimes in lands where tyrannical politicians have banned tobacco promotion.

In the early 1980s, a British health minister told the tobacco industry, during talks about a new self regulation agreement, that he would like to see the health warning on the cigarette pack augmented by a printed warning on the cigarette itself. If a cigarette can carry the brand name, as in many cases it does, he argued that printing "SMOKING KILLS" or some other such message along the length of the paper wrapper should be no problem. A special advisor had warned him to expect the industry representatives to hit the roof, because the pure, white cylinder was a vital part of the compendium of visual and creative tricks that for so long kept smokers' perceptions of the risks of smoking so far removed from reality. On the day he dropped the bombshell, numbed silence was the only immedi-

ate response from the tobacco pushers, but what no-one could have foreseen was the breathtaking audacity of the industry's considered response at the next round of meetings. Apparently, what had really been bothering these much maligned people was the fear that if they were forced to add all that black printing ink to their product, it might cause carcinogens to be generated as the paper burned down during smoking!

Earlier this year, Canadians were treated to a similarly absurd response from the industry during parliamentary discussions about the striking new health warnings being proposed there (see *Tobacco Control* 1999;8:356–61). The technology needed to portray such detailed colour images, such as the none too attractive one on oral cancer, for example, demanded printing machinery so complex that the massive printing job would have to be placed outside Canada. So now printers' jobs were at stake, and the government would be solely responsible. Printing is apparently a major industry in Canada, serving not only the needs of Canadians, but a much wider market overseas. Even ignoring the industry's tendency to vastly exaggerate the number of jobs dependent on certain processes when fighting an effective health measure, it is hard to see how a large industry would suffer more than a small one for the loss of a fixed amount of printing. Nevertheless, the creative wing of the tobacco industry must have celebrated an apparently successful new lobbying device, as politicians contemplated whether they could face thousands of angry redundant printers marching on the parliament building. Their celebrations were short lived, however. A few

days later, a health advocate supplied a parliamentarian with a strip of cardboard of the type used for making cigarette packs, nicely printed with the proposed new warnings—by a Canadian printing company. And further down the line the industry reverted to more traditional methods: if the regulations were agreed (they later were), they would simply take the printing jobs out of the country. Somehow, it felt almost reassuring to be back to good old blackmail.

## Cambodia: smoke-free pagoda

Few countries provide as much freedom for the tobacco industry as Cambodia, but a growing movement among Buddhist monks promises to be a strong influence on the community and government as well as a unique challenge for the industry. Monks say that Buddha's teachings do not mention tobacco, but they do preach abstinence from harmful substances. Smoking prevalence among monks may be higher than 60%, but they have only recently started to become aware that smoking is addictive and harmful. Quit programmes at pagodas have resulted in over 80% success rates after one year. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Cambodia initiated the first "Tobacco or Health" programmes in Cambodia some three years ago. Programmes continue to grow, in collaboration with the ministries of health, education, and cults and religion.



*Tobacco Free Buddhist monks in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, outside their pagoda, pronounced smoke-free earlier this year.*